

SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE

15 March 2021

William Donnelly, Chair of the Board of Directors
Michael Johnson, Ph.D., President
Steven Herbert, Ph.D., Provost and Academic Vice President
John Carroll University
1 John Carroll Blvd.
University Heights, OH 44118

Dear Mr. Donnelly, Dr. Johnson, and Dr. Herbert,

The Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) expresses its deep concern about the recent decision of the Board of Directors at John Carroll University to approve a “budgetary hardship” amendment to the Faculty Handbook—a move that effectively eliminates tenure protections as commonly understood.

In a January 2021 statement, signed by thirty national professional associations, including the SBL, the American Council of Learned Societies affirmed its commitment to academic freedom and the importance of tenure in protecting that freedom:

Precisely because financial pressure can lead to shortsighted decisions with the potential to do irreversible damage to institutions and to current and future generations of students, the preservation of the established process of tenure except in thoroughly documented cases of the deepest financial exigency has been long upheld by US colleges and universities. It is key to the principles of academic freedom and tenure first articulated by the American Association of University Professors in 1915, promulgated in the 1940 *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure* by the AAUP and the Association of American Colleges (now the Association of American Colleges and Universities), and now endorsed by hundreds of educational and scholarly organizations in the United States.

We reaffirm our commitment to these principles in calling on the John Carroll board to reconsider the budgetary hardship amendment. We object to a policy that allows for university administrators to terminate tenured faculty members without cause and without appeal, apart from a situation of financial exigency or in the absence of genuine educational reasons. In particular, the ability of administrators to select individual faculty positions for elimination creates a chilling environment for teaching and research and undermines shared governance.

We do not doubt the serious financial challenges facing schools like John Carroll. However, the budgetary hardship amendment is an outlier among peer institutions. Its implementation will have long-lasting negative repercussions not only for John Carroll, but also for Catholic higher

education more broadly. We urge you to reconsider and to engage faculty in finding solutions that will allow the university not just to survive but to thrive into the future.

Sincerely,

John F. Kutsko
Executive Director, Society of Biblical Literature

Tat-siong Benny Liew
Chair of the SBL Council, Class of 1956 Professor of New Testament Studies, College of the Holy Cross

James C. VanderKam
President of SBL, John A. O'Brien Professor of Hebrew Scriptures, Emeritus, University of Notre Dame